

Communication for Cultural Heritage Preservation the Pottery-Making of the Li People in Hainan Province, China.

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Abstract

This study examined communication for preserving Li ethnic pottery in Hainan, China. The objectives were to (1) investigate traditional and modern communication methods used to transmit pottery knowledge, (2) explore community participation in cultural preservation, and (3) propose a sustainable communication model. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through document analysis, in-depth interviews, and field observations with craftsmen, cultural masters, community leaders, officials, youth, and scholars. The findings showed that Li cultural preservation relies on traditional communication—oral teaching, rituals, and hands-on learning—and modern communication, such as digital media and social platforms, which broaden awareness among younger generations. The communication process includes four stages: dissemination, awareness building, participation promotion, and empowerment, using cultural narratives and symbols to express the meaning of Li pottery. Community participation is essential, as members co-create activities, exhibitions, and media while collaborating with state and academic institutions. Key supportive factors include strong leadership, government support, and digital technology, whereas major challenges involve economic pressures, industrial competition, and reduced youth motivation.

The study developed a five-component framework for cultural preservation communication—sender, process, receiver, media, and outcomes—drawing on key theories such as Diffusion of Innovations, Cultural Communication, Narrative Paradigm, Communication for Development, and Participatory Communication. Policy recommendations emphasize empowering local communities, strengthening multi-sector cooperation, promoting digital technology and cultural databases, and integrating Li pottery heritage into education. Overall, communication acts as a bridge connecting the past and present, enabling Li pottery to remain authentic while adapting sustainably in a globalized era.

Keywords: *Communication for Preservation, Local Culture, Li Ethnic Pottery, Hainan Province, Communication for Development*

Introduction

Communication for the preservation of local culture plays a crucial role in safeguarding the intellectual heritage that reflects a community's way of life, beliefs, and identity. This is especially true in the era of globalization, where rapid technological advancements and modern culture exert a strong influence, causing many local cultures to gradually disappear or have their value diminished. China, with its more than 50 diverse ethnic groups, is currently facing the challenge of preserving its cultural heritage. One notable example is the "Pottery of the Li Ethnic Group" on Hainan Island, an indigenous craft that reflects the deep connection between people, nature, beliefs, and the community's spirit.

However, socio-economic changes have reduced the role of pottery in daily life. Younger generations lack the incentive to inherit the tradition, and the knowledge transmission system is weakening. Although the government has attempted to conserve it as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), without communication that is accessible and appealing to the new generation, preservation efforts will not be sustainable.

Therefore, communication serves as a vital mechanism for transmitting cultural value, creating awareness, and stimulating community participation. Effective communication can foster an understanding of this indigenous wisdom, build a proud cultural image, and lead to creative economy extensions, such as developing the pottery into cultural products with unique stories and distinctive identities.

Consequently, studying the communication strategies for the preservation of the Li ethnic group's pottery is significant from academic, social, and policy perspectives. It aims to identify appropriate communication strategies for the sustainable preservation and revitalization of this local wisdom in the modern era, while also serving as a model for application in the conservation of other local cultures.

Research Objectives

1. To study the communication models and processes utilized by the Li ethnic group in transmitting knowledge and preserving their pottery within local communities.
2. To examine public participation and the communication strategies used to build community engagement for the conservation of cultural arts and the sustainable revitalization of the Li ethnic group's pottery.

Literature Review

This study focuses on communication for the preservation of local culture, specifically the "Pottery of the Li Ethnic Group," which is an indigenous wisdom reflecting the identity of communities in Hainan Province, China. The relevant literature review thus covers the concepts of local culture, communication for cultural preservation, and the characteristics of Li ethnic pottery, as well as the conceptual framework utilized in the study.

Local culture refers to the system of ideas, beliefs, customs, traditions, arts, and ways of life of people in a community, which is passed down from ancestors to succeeding generations and possesses

unique characteristics distinct from other areas (Smith, 2015). This culture forms the foundation of social identity and reflects the relationship between humans and the environment. The Li people in Hainan Province possess a unique culture, particularly in their pottery craftsmanship, which showcases their technical skill, indigenous wisdom, beliefs, and community life. It serves both as a functional utensil and a symbolic cultural marker.

Communication for cultural preservation refers to the process of exchanging information, news, knowledge, and skills among individuals or groups to create understanding, awareness, and participation in safeguarding cultural identity (Hall, 2013). The Cultural Communication Theory explains that communication helps members of society realize the shared value and meaning of their culture. Conversely, the Cultural Preservation Theory suggests that communication plays a crucial role in transmitting knowledge and customs through social activities and shared learning.

The pottery of the Li ethnic group is a product of long-inherited wisdom, characterized by the use of local clay and traditional molding techniques. The shapes and patterns reflect the community's beliefs and traditions. These pottery pieces are therefore not just artistic products but also cultural symbols that signify the identity of the Li people. Preservation, in this context, means maintaining wisdom, art, and cultural identity in a manner consistent with the current social context.

The conceptual framework of this study focuses on communication for the preservation of Li ethnic pottery, viewing communication as the primary mechanism for transmitting cultural knowledge and value. This transmission occurs through various channels, such as lectures, practical training, and online media. The communication content includes history, production methods, and the meaning behind the patterns, which is intended to lead to an understanding of cultural values. The cultural preservation aspect comprises the inheritance of indigenous wisdom, the maintenance of community identity, and the creation of awareness and pride in the local culture. The conceptual hypothesis of this study is that creative communication and community participation will lead to the sustainable preservation of the Li ethnic group's pottery.

Research Methodology

Sampling Method This research employs Purposive Sampling because it requires in-depth information from individuals who possess direct knowledge, understanding, and involvement in the communication for the preservation of the Li ethnic group's pottery. The sample size of 30 participants is determined in accordance with the guidelines for qualitative research, which prioritizes the depth of data over quantity (Creswell, 2018). This number is appropriate for gathering in-depth data and conducting content analysis within the specific local cultural context. **Sample Groups** The selected sample groups are as follows : Local Artisans/Pottery Inheritors : 5 individuals, Community Leaders/Elders: 10 individuals, Community Youth/Students: 10 individuals, Cultural/Educational Agency Officials: 5 individuals This structured purposive selection ensures that the study gathers diverse perspectives from key stakeholders

involved in the creation, transmission, community leadership, and official management of the Li pottery heritage.

Data Collection Instruments. Data Collection Instruments This study is a Qualitative Research project. Therefore, the data collection instruments are focused on gathering in-depth information from both Human Sources and relevant Documentary Sources. **Primary Instruments** The primary tool for data collection is the Semi-structured Interview Guide. This guide contains open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses concerning communication models, processes, and community participation in preserving the Li ethnic group's pottery. **Instrument Validation (Validation and IOC)** The validation of the instruments was conducted by three experts (validators): 1. A specialist in Communication Arts., 2. A specialist in Chinese Culture and Ethnic Studies., 3. A specialist in Qualitative Research. The purpose of this validation was to assess the congruence (validity) of the interview questions with the research objectives. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was used, and only items with an IOC score of not less than 0.50 were retained, following the guidelines proposed by Rovinelli and Hambleton (1977). Subsequently, the researcher revised and edited the wording of the interview guide based on the expert recommendations to ensure appropriateness and clarity.

The data collection procedure for this qualitative research is designed to obtain in-depth information regarding the communication processes (both internal and external to the community) that affect the preservation and inheritance of the Li ethnic group's pottery wisdom. The study employs a mixed-method approach, combining: **In-depth Interviews:** Conducted with the purposively sampled key informants (artisans, elders, youth, and officials) to gather detailed perspectives on communication models, knowledge transmission, and participation. **Field Observation:** Systematic observation of community activities, pottery production processes, and social interactions within the Li communities to understand the actual context and non-verbal communication surrounding the craft. **Document/Digital Media Analysis:** Reviewing relevant documents, such as official conservation reports, educational materials, promotional media, and digital content (social media, websites) to understand formal and contemporary external communication efforts. This integrated approach aligns with ethnographic methodologies (Spradley, 1980) and the principles of Communication for Development/Cultural Preservation (Rogers, 1976), ensuring a rich and holistic understanding of the role of communication in cultural heritage safeguarding.

Instrument Quality Check and Validation To ensure the quality of the research instruments, experts were tasked with evaluating the appropriateness, comprehensiveness, clarity of the questions, and congruence with the research variables. The experts utilized the Item-Objective Congruence Index (IOC) form to check the content validity of the interview guide. The acceptance criterion for an item was set at $IOC \geq 0.50$ The reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha statistics, which reflects the internal consistency of the questions within each specific area or theme. The results of the pilot testing indicated that the overall reliability of the questionnaire/interview guide was greater than 0.80 This value is considered high and appropriate for research in the social sciences. Following the validation process, the researcher made revisions based on the expert recommendations: **Wording and Arrangement:** The phrasing,

questions, and order of the items were adjusted. Clarity and Neutrality: The interview content was refined using clear, simple, and neutral language to ensure it was easily understood and did not lead the respondents toward specific answers. Depth of Inquiry: Open-ended questions were added to provide informants with opportunities to reflect their in-depth perspectives.

Data Analysis Method The data collected in this qualitative study will be analyzed using Descriptive Analysis (Descriptive Analytical Method). This approach will be employed to describe and explain the following key areas: Communication Processes, Models, and Methods: Analyzing how communication is structured, the forms it takes, and the specific channels used for knowledge transmission and cultural preservation within the Li community. Community Participation: Describing the extent and nature of community involvement that promotes the conservation of cultural arts and heritage. Problems and Obstacles: Identifying and explaining the challenges, barriers, and difficulties encountered in communication efforts aimed at local cultural preservation. Contextual Analysis: Analyzing the community's communication and preservation efforts within the context of changing social dynamics (e.g., globalization, economic shifts) to understand how the shifting environment influences cultural heritage safeguarding. The analysis will primarily involve Content Analysis of the transcribed in-depth interviews, field observation notes, and reviewed documents. Key themes, patterns, and categories related to communication, participation, and social change will be identified and interpreted to provide a comprehensive, narrative description that addresses the research objectives.

Research Results

This qualitative research, titled "Communication for the Preservation of Local Culture: The Pottery of the Li Ethnic Group, Hainan Province, China," involved data collection structured around four key sets of questions addressed to four distinct groups through In-depth Interviewing. The findings regarding the inheritance of Li pottery wisdom are summarized as follows:

1. Interview Structure (4 Sets of Questions) The researcher divided the data collection into four main lines of inquiry, with three questions for each group : 1. Questions for interviewing Local Artisans/Pottery Inheritors (Hainan Province)., 2. Questions for interviewing Community Leaders/Elders (Hainan Province)., 3. Questions for interviewing Community Youth/Students (Hainan Province)., 4. Questions for interviewing Cultural/Educational Agency Officials (Hainan Province).

2. Synthesis of Interview Findings (Thematic Summary) The inheritance of the Li ethnic pottery wisdom in Hainan Province is a process that connects the old generation with the new through communication, learning, and hands-on practice.

Local Artisans/Pottery Inheritors: The wisdom begins with learning within the family and community. Artisans act as knowledge transmitters through observation, oral instruction, and practical training—covering clay preparation, shaping, pattern decoration, and traditional firing. This process reflects artistic skill, the spirit of the earth, and long-standing cultural understanding.

Community Leaders/Elders: They value pottery as a spiritual symbol reflecting the Li people's way of life, beliefs, and rituals (e.g., ancestor worship, weddings, festivals). Learning historically took place within the family but has now expanded to schools, cultural centers, and community activities. Digital media is utilized for dissemination and knowledge recording, making it more accessible to youth and enhancing their appreciation for the culture.

Community Youth/Students: Youth perceive pottery not merely as a utensil but as art with a story and meaning. They learn through workshops, practical training, and online media, grasping both the techniques and the spiritual value. Learning hands-on inspires a sense of pride and motivation in their cultural identity.

Cultural/Educational Agency Officials: Agencies play a vital role in promotion and support through training programs, exhibitions, curriculum integration in schools, and digital technology (e.g., demonstration videos, online databases). Obstacles persist regarding youth interest, resources, and personnel, requiring continuous support. Integration of cultural arts with education and innovation is necessary to ensure the vibrant and sustainable existence of the Li indigenous wisdom.

In summary, communication for the preservation of Li ethnic pottery is the result of collaboration among all sectors—artisans, community leaders, youth, and government agencies. This effort utilizes a blend of traditional communication and digital media to transmit knowledge, foster inspiration, and safeguard the cultural identity for future generations.

Conclusion

Communication for cultural preservation in the Li community serves as an exemplary case of integrating High-Context Communication, digital media utilization, and participatory community engagement. This blend helps ensure that indigenous wisdom is continuously transmitted to younger generations, while the vital task of balancing commercialization with ritualistic value remains crucial for the Li culture to maintain its vitality and deep significance.

1. The Role of High-Context Communication (HCC) The communication for cultural preservation in the Li community reflects the specific characteristics of Asian cultures, which often feature High-Context Communication (Hall, 1976). Observation and Participation: The research findings indicate that the exchange of cultural knowledge and wisdom in the Li community is not limited to words or documents. It is embedded in rituals, traditions, collective practices, and physical gestures. Deep Understanding: Learning occurs through observation and direct participation, reflecting complex interpersonal relationships and shared understanding. Symbolic Meaning: This HCC aligns with Hall's concept that Asian cultures prioritize context and symbolic meaning over explicit verbal communication alone. Understanding culture and rituals through this method allows community members to genuinely interpret the profound meanings of their traditional wisdom.

2. Digital Media and Participatory Culture In the digital age, the dissemination of Li culture has expanded to online media, such as pottery-making videos, online exhibitions, and digital social platforms.

This shift makes the community's wisdom and stories easily accessible to the new generation. Facilitating Participation: The use of digital media is not just a communication channel; it creates opportunities for a Participatory Culture (Jenkins, 2006), allowing audiences to construct meaning and interact with the content. Social Impact: This aligns with Lasswell's (1948) view of communication as a tool for creating social impact. Accessing culture via digital media fosters awareness and appreciation of the indigenous wisdom among youth, creating an incentive for their participation in its inheritance.

3. Participatory Communication and Community Empowerment Participatory Communication is a vital factor that strengthens the community's power and resilience. Ownership: Research shows that involving the community in designing activities, organizing exhibitions, and disseminating their culture instills a sense of ownership over their own information and wisdom. Sustainability Model: The concepts of Servaes (2008) and Melkote & Steeves (2001) suggest that communication for sustainable development should empower the community to define the content and process. This level of participation builds a collaborative network between the old and new generations, ensuring the continuous and sustainable inheritance of wisdom.

4. The Challenge of Cultural Commodification While the integration of culture into the digital market and tourism sector generates income and expands economic opportunities, it presents a challenge to the spiritual value of the craft. Erosion of Ritual Meaning: Commercialization risks diminishing the ritualistic meaning of pottery, a core component of the community's identity. Cultural Commodification Theory: Harrison's (2013) concept of Cultural Commodification points out that transforming culture into a commodity for trade may cause the spiritual depth and richness of the wisdom to be overlooked. Balancing Act: The research reflects the community's imperative to balance economic utilization with the preservation of core ritualistic values to safeguard their culture and maintain their social identity.

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